# Oakland Oregon High School 1917
## From the Snapshot Album of Thurman Dear

### Reflections
Jeffrey Hunt
December 9 2025

This photo was taken in Oakland, Oregon, around 1916–1917. It shows three high-school girls sitting at what appear to be Underwood typewriters—surprisingly modern equipment for a small rural school at the time.

By the mid-1910s, a few Oregon high schools were introducing basic clerical or "commercial" programs, but in a place the size of Oakland, even owning two or three typewriters was a significant investment. In today's dollars, each Underwood would have cost hundreds, so a short row like this suggests the school was doing what it could to prepare students—especially young women—for office work in a world that was quickly modernizing.

If you look closely at the table, you can see small bottles lined up behind each typewriter. These weren't for correcting errors—there was no such thing in 1916—but they were part of the supplies used in early typing instruction. Schools kept bottles of copying fluid, cleaning solution, and typewriter oil so students could practice making carbon copies and learn basic machine maintenance. Ribbons were expensive, especially in rural Oregon, so some schools even refilled them by hand using bottled ink. For a small high school, this simple setup of typewriters, fluids, and office tools functioned as a miniature business classroom.

The print itself is what really tells the story. It's overexposed, unevenly cut, and full of the specks and streaks you get when photos are developed in improvised spaces. My grandfather, Thurman Dear, grew up on a farm in Oakland, and based on the condition of many of the prints in his album—dust embedded in the emulsion, bits of feather fluff, even the occasional cobweb—I'm convinced they were processing photos wherever they could: maybe a back room, maybe a shed, maybe whatever space was dark enough to hang a line and mix chemicals.

That's part of the charm. These aren't studio portraits. They're the everyday snapshots of a young boy experimenting with photography in a farm environment where "darkroom" probably meant "any place we can block out the light."

And here are three young women—likely born around 1902—daughters and granddaughters of early Oregon families, learning to type on some of the most modern tools their small high school could provide. A quiet, candid moment from more than a century ago, recorded with all the grit, dust, and honesty of early home-developed photography.